Premier, School Boards Discuss Education Needs

Department of Education and Culture (to July 99)
April 3, 1998 13:10

The need to invest significantly more money in public education was the main topic of discussion at a meeting Thursday, April 2, involving Premier Russell MacLellan, Education and Culture Minister Robbie Harrison, and Margaret Forbes, president of the Nova Scotia School Boards Association.

"Education is one of the top spending priorities of government, and budgetary decisions will be made accordingly," said Premier MacLellan. "We discussed a multi-year plan, so we can bring as many dollars to education as quickly as possible -- while maintaining a balanced budget."

Ms. Forbes said she is encouraged by the premier's and minister's understanding of the need for more funding.

"School boards want to hire more teachers and teaching assistants to reduce class sizes," she said. "They want to invest in textbooks, technology and other education priorities. Additional funding would enable them to make these investments."

Ms. Forbes stressed, however, that school boards need confirmation of their funding as quickly as possible so they can make staffing and program decisions for next fall.

Mr. Harrison said boards have received a first instalment as a starting point for their budgets. This first instalment honours the commitment to cover higher teacher salaries -- at a cost of $22 million.

As well, last year, school boards received about $12 million in bridge financing and other one-time funding. This year, the province is adding the $12 million to the base budgets of school boards, allowing them to count on this funding annually. The funds are being distributed based on needs identified last year, and in line with the premier's commitment to help boards facing declining enrolments and increasing costs.

Mr. Harrison said boards will receive a second instalment to build "go-forward" budgets to honour commitments to reduce class size and increase programs and services for students. Funding levels and spending priorities will be based on the advice of school boards themselves.

The Education Funding Review Work Group Report recommends significant re-investments in education, phased in over several years. The report will be presented to the new cabinet, and information will be shared with school boards as quickly as possible as the provincial budget process unfolds.

Ms. Forbes brought to the premier's and minister's attention the concern of school boards regarding the need for new and renovated

schools as quickly as possible. The premier reaffirmed government's commitment to build more than 30 new schools in partnership with the private sector, along with investing $90 million for renovations over several years.

"Our young people need new schools now, and we have a plan to build those schools quickly without adding a penny of debt to the province," said Premier MacLellan. "We now have our first lease -- with more to come -- and all will show good value for taxpayers."

The premier also updated Ms. Forbes on negotiations with the federal government on technology funding. "For more than a year now, we've been working very hard on a multi-million-dollar agreement to dramatically increase technology in our high schools. This agreement will move us toward our goal of a 5-1 student-computer ratio by 2005."

The premier said government will continue working with the school boards' association and other education partners to improve learning opportunities for students.

NOTE: The following is intended for use by broadcast media.

It looks like more money is on the way for education in Nova Scotia.

The province's school boards have already received news of a first instalment -- including 22-million dollars to honour a commitment to pay teachers higher salaries.

And Premier Russell MacLellan says there's more to come.

He met with the school boards' association and reiterated that education is one of the government's top spending priorities.

He says that will be kept in mind when decisions on the budget are made.

There's a plan in the works to provide as many dollars to education as quickly as possible over the next few years -- while maintaining a balanced budget.

-30-

Contacts: Kim Jardine
Premier's Office
902-424-2590
E-mail: jardinkr@gov.ns.ca

Frank Barteaux
Nova Scotia School Boards Association
902-420-9191

Donna MacDonald
Education and Culture
902-424-2615
E-mail: macdondc@gov.ns.ca

ngr Apr. 3, 1998 1:10 p.m.

This page and all contents Crown copyright © 2006, Province of Nova Scotia, all rights reserved. Please send comments to Communications Nova Scotia: release@gov.ns.ca

Privacy